

Why taking not taking a position is taking a position

Martin Tadlock, Interim Regional Chancellor

There has been a rush of speculation and reaction to proposed legislation that would move the three USF institutions from separate accreditations to a single accredited university. I have been very clear about not taking a position on the proposed change, choosing to do so for several reasons.

First, deciding to not take a position is to take a position. Thirty-six years in education at six different state universities has taught me that the priority of someone in this role is to work with everyone to support students, faculty and staff. At times, this means refusing to take a position because it is in the best interest of students, faculty and staff to do so at the time.

Second, not taking a position does not mean that I am silent. I will share all information I have and share what I believe are the positives and negatives about moving to a single accreditation. My first obligation is to work with others, all others, to ensure that USFSP continues to serve students and the community, continues to expand its reach, and continues along the same outstanding path we are on regardless of what comes our way.

Third, rushing to judgment without gathering thoughtful input from others and digging deeply beneath the surface of the issue at hand can result in action that is premature and harmful to students, faculty, and staff. It can result in actions and statements that jeopardize relationships with those who support the university now and into the future. We believe in process. We believe in reasoning. See: <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/critical-thinking-where-to-begin/796>

Fourth, historical baggage is informative, but should not drive the future. There is truth in Thomas Wolfe's words 'you can't go home again.' Those who attend and will attend USFSP, those who work here, and those who engage and contribute here will drive the future. We will not go back to the past. Anyone who knows me knows that is who I am, and President Genshaft has been very clear about that as well.

Finally, there are wide variations in higher education organizational structure across the country. There are strengths and weaknesses in all of them. Organizational structures are created by people and can be changed by

people. We are a public university. We answer to the public; all the public. We comply with statutes, regulations, laws, and we rise to meet board expectations. Input concerning those statutes, regulations, laws and expectations should go to individuals who are vested with the responsibility for creating such, after thoughtful consideration, study, and dialogue. We are in the middle of that process at this time. We are providing our input and will continue to do so throughout the process. We have been heard and will continue to be heard.

Below are a few questions asked by students who are applying for admission to USFSP for the coming summer and fall, along with answers we have provided. We believe our current students have many of the same questions. We will continue to schedule opportunities for comments and questions about the impact of moving to a single accreditation. Feel free to contact me at any time.

Will one accreditation for USF affect students?

1. Why go to USFSP if it's going to become the same as USF Tampa?
 - a. USFSP will continue to maintain its own unique identity – as a close-knit school community, with low faculty-to-student ratio, affordable tuition, a university that prides itself in outside the classroom learning opportunities and experiences, and which resides in the heart of a thriving city and on a beautiful waterfront. Also, we will offer majors here specific to USF St Petersburg.

2. Will Single Accreditation Happen?
 - a. It is too early to tell. The proposed legislation is currently making its way through committees in the Florida House of Representatives. If it makes it through Committee, then the legislation will need to be voted on and passed by the entire House and from there, taken up and passed by the Senate. Finally, if it gets that far, the bill will need to be approved and signed by the Governor. Throughout this entire process, the language could change or be amended.

3. What does it mean?

- a. If the legislation does pass, it means that instead of each institution within the USF System (USF Tampa, USF St. Petersburg and USF Sarasota-Manatee) having its own separate accreditation, there would be one accreditation for the System. It is hard to say exactly what changes would occur. But the reason this could be beneficial is that each of the universities could share in “Preeminence” that USF Tampa has achieved, meaning receiving more funding that can create a better college experience for students. It may also mean more academic programs and majors will be offered at USFSP to address the growing demand and interest of students that come here. It will mean students may take classes and programs at any of the three campuses without transfer issues. It may mean doctoral programs will come to USF St Petersburg and more research opportunities for students to participate in research with faculty.
4. When will it happen, if it passes?
 - a. If the legislation passes this session, then the USF System will have until January 15, 2019 to develop a plan on how we will transition from 3 separate accreditations to 1 single system-wide accreditation. We will work closely with our colleagues at the other schools and with the Board of Trustees on such a plan that will benefit each institution. If the plan is approved, then the USF System would be operating under a single accreditation by July 1, 2020.
 5. How would it affect a Fall 2018 freshman? Fall 2019 freshman?
 - a. There will be no effect on fall 2018 freshman, fall 2019 freshman or any other USFSP students. The top priority is to ensure no disruption in learning and the overall college experience for students. Our goal remains the same, to ensure that students enrolled at USFSP are successful. It will result in more academic programs being offered at USF St Petersburg, not less.
 6. Will students have to travel for classes, clubs, etc? Will travel accommodations be made?
 - a. If anything, the single accreditation will mean that more classes, majors and degrees will be offered at USFSP. Regardless of the outcome, each campus will continue to provide all students with

world-class education and opportunities in a pre-eminent university.

In closing, I believe that the core of who we are at USFSP will not change regardless of our structure. As Peter Drucker said, 'culture eats strategy for lunch.' We have built a distinctive university culture at USF St Petersburg and it is reflected in the following:

- We are a living/learning community
- We are St Petersburg and St. Petersburg 'are' us
- We are family
- We live democratic principles
- Everything teaches and everyone is a teacher
- We engage with students and with each other
- We continue to review and improve our approach to learning and teaching
- We are experiential
- We love what we do